



MACROPUS MAJOR: Shaw.

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[illegible]

MACROPUS MAJOR, Shaw.

Great Grey Kangaroo.

Spec. Char.—*Macropus vellere corporis, supernè, e cinereo fusco, apud antibrachios et abdomen canescenti-cinereo, antipedibus, pedibus posticis, caudæque apice nigris; lineâ albescente suprâ labium per genas excurrente.*

Descr.—All the fur on the upper surface uniform greyish brown above, passing into grisly grey on the arm and under surface; a faint line of greyish white above the upper lip and along the sides of the face; hands, feet, and tip of the tail black.

	Male.		Female.	
	feet.	inches.	feet.	inches.
Length from the nose to the extremity of the tail	7	10	5	11½
„ of tail	3	2	2	4½
„ „ tarsus and toes, including the nail	1	3	1	½
„ „ arm and hand, including the nails	1	6		10½
„ „ face from the tip of the nose to the base of the ear . . .		9		8
„ „ ear		5½		5

- Macropus giganteus*, Shaw, Nat. Misc., pl. 33.
Didelphis gigantea, Linn. Syst. Nat. Gmel., p. 109.—Schreb., t. 154.
Kanguroo, Cook's Voy., vol. iii. p. 577. pl. 20.—Phill. Voy., pl. in p. 106.—White's Voy., pl. in p. 272.
Macropus major, Shaw, Gen. Zool., vol. i. p. 305. pl. 115.—Cook's First Voy., vol. iv. p. 45. pl. 2.—Desm. Nouv. Dict. d'Hist. Nat., tom. xvii. p. 33.
Kangurus labiatus, Geoff. Encycl., pl. 21. fig. 4.—Desm. Ency. Méth. Mamm., p. 273.
Boomer, Forester, Old Man Kangaroo of the Colonists, Bundaary of the Aborigines of the Liverpool range.

THERE can be little doubt of the present species being that noticed by our celebrated navigator Cook, in his voyage round the world in 1770; and as I conceive all information connected with this early-known species will be interesting, I shall commence my account of its history with a quotation from the above-mentioned work.

“On Friday, June the twenty-second, while stationed for a short time on the south-east coast of Australia,” says Captain Cook, “a party, who were engaged in shooting pigeons for the use of the sick of the ship, saw an animal, which they described to be ‘as large as a greyhound, of a slender make, of a mouse-colour, and extremely swift.’ The following day the same kind of animal was again seen by a great many other people. On the twenty-fourth it was seen by Captain Cook himself, who, walking at a little distance from the shore, observed a quadruped, which he thought bore some resemblance to a greyhound, and was of a light mouse-colour, with a long tail, and which he should have taken for a kind of wild dog, had not its extraordinary manner of leaping, instead of running, convinced him of the contrary. Mr. Banks also obtained a transient view of it, and immediately concluded it to be an animal perfectly new and undescribed.

“The sight of a creature so extraordinary could not fail to excite, in the mind of a philosophic observer, the most ardent wishes for a complete examination. These were at length gratified; Mr. Gore, one of the associates in the expedition of Captain Cook, having been so fortunate as to shoot one in the course of a few days.”

Such is the earliest notice to be found relative to this fine species, of which living examples were a few years afterwards brought to Europe, and have from time to time formed an interesting addition to our menageries. It is however remarkable, that though it has now been introduced for so long a period, all attempts at naturalizing it have hitherto proved futile; still, from my own observations of the animal in a state of nature, I am led to believe that a small degree of perseverance is alone requisite to effect so desirable an object. Should I be so fortunate as to interest any who have the means, as well as the inclination, in the furtherance of this object, we may yet hope to see our large parks and forests graced with the presence of this highly ornamental and singular animal. That it would bear the severities of our winters is almost beyond a doubt, since in Van Diemen's Land, among other places, it resorts to the bleak, wet, and frequently snow-capped summit of Mount Wellington. The kind of country which appears most suitable to its nature, consists of low grassy hills and plains, skirted by thin open forests of brushwood, to the latter of which, especially on the continent of Australia, it resorts for shelter from the oppressive heat of the mid-day sun. Although the numbers of this large species are becoming greatly reduced in consequence of the intrusion of civilized man, and though it has disappeared from those localities where he has taken up his abode, accompanied by his vast flocks and herds, still the immense tracts of sterile unwatered country which characterize Australia, and present physical obstacles to cultivation, will, in my opinion, for a long period afford a sufficient asylum for the preservation of the race.

It enjoys a wide range of habitat, being spread over the colony of New South Wales, the interior to the northward as far as it has yet been penetrated, as well as the whole of the intermediate country between New South Wales and South Australia, where I observed it tolerably abundant; but I am induced to believe this latter district is almost the boundary of its range westward, although, on this point, I may be in error.

I should consider it as not, strictly speaking, a gregarious animal, as I have never seen more than six or eight together, and have more frequently met with it singly or in pairs. Its senses of smelling and hearing are so exquisite that it is extremely difficult of approach without detection, and to effect this it is always necessary to advance against the wind. It browses upon various kinds of grasses, herbs and low shrubs, a kind of food which renders its flesh well-tasted and nutritive. The early dawn and evening are the periods at which it feeds, and at which it is most certain to be met with.

Although hunted and frequently killed by the Dingo, its most formidable antagonist has hitherto been the Aborigine, who employs several modes of obtaining it; sometimes stealing upon it with the utmost caution under covert of the trees and bushes, until it is within the range of his spear, which is generally thrown with unerring aim; at other times, having discovered their retreat, the natives unite in a party, and, forming a large circle gradually, close in upon them

with shouts and yells, by which the animals are so terrified and confused, that they easily become victims to the bommerengs, clubs and spears which are directed against them from all sides.

Still, however formidable an enemy the Aborigine may have been, the Great Grey Kangaroo finds, at the present time, a far greater one in the white man, whose superior knowledge enables him to employ, for its destruction, much more efficient weapons and assailants than those of the more simple son of nature. Independently of the gun, he brings to his aid dogs of superior breed, and of so savage a nature, that the timid kangaroo has but little chance when opposed to them. These dogs, which run entirely by sight, partake of the nature of the greyhound and deerhound, and from their great strength and fleetness are so well adapted for the duties to which they are trained, that its escape, when this occurs, is owing to peculiar and favourable circumstances, as, for example, the oppressive heat of the day, or the nature of the ground; the former incapacitating the dogs for a severe chase, and the hard ridges which the kangaroo invariably endeavours to gain giving him a great advantage over his pursuers. On such grounds the females in particular will frequently outstrip the fleetest greyhound, while, on the contrary, heavy old males, on soft ground, are easily overtaken. Many of these fine kangaroo-dogs are kept at the stock-stations of the interior for the sole purpose of running the kangaroo and the emu, the latter being killed solely for the supply of oil which it yields, and the former for mere sport, or for food for the dogs. Although I have killed the largest males with a single dog, it is not generally advisable to attempt this, as they possess great power, and frequently rip up the dogs, and sometimes even cut them to the heart with a single stroke of the hind leg. Three or four dogs are more generally laid on, one of superior fleetness to "pull" the kangaroo, while the others rush in upon and kill it. It sometimes adopts a singular mode of defending itself by clasping its short powerful fore-limbs around its antagonist, leaping away with it to the nearest water-hole, and there keeping it beneath the surface until drowned; with dogs the old males will do this whenever they have an opportunity, and it is said that they will also attempt to do the same with man. In Van Diemen's Land the *Macropus major* forms an object of chase, and like the deer and fox in England, is hunted with hounds; and twice a week, during the season, the Nimrods of this distant land may be seen, mounted on their fleet steeds, crossing the ferry of the Derwent, at Hobart Town, on their way to the hunting-ground, where they seldom meet without "finding." The following particulars of the "hunt" have been obligingly forwarded to me by the Honourable Henry Elliot, late aide-de-camp to His Excellency Sir John Franklin, and one of its chief patrons.

"I have much pleasure in telling you all I know of the kangaroo-hunting in Van Diemen's Land. The hounds are kept by Mr. Gregson, and have been bred by him from foxhounds imported from England; and though not so fast as most hounds here now are, they are quite as fast as it is possible to ride to in that country.

"The 'Boomer' is the only kangaroo which shows good sport, for the strongest 'Brush Kangaroo' cannot live above twenty minutes before the hounds; but as the two kinds are always found in perfectly different situations, we never were at a loss to find a Boomer, and I must say that they seldom failed to show us good sport. We generally 'found' in a high cover of young wattles; but sometimes we 'found' in the open forest, and then it was really pretty to see the style in which a good kangaroo would go away. I recollect one day in particular, when a very fine Boomer jumped up in the very middle of the hounds, in the 'open'; he at first took a few high jumps with his head up, looking about him to see on which side the coast was clearest, and then, without a moment's hesitation, he stooped forward and shot away from the hounds, apparently without an effort, and gave us the longest run I ever saw after a kangaroo. He ran fourteen miles by the map from point to point, and if he had had fair play, I have very little doubt but that he would then have beat us; but he had taken along a tongue of land which ran into the sea, so that, on being pressed, he was forced to try to swim across the arm of the sea, which, at the place where he took the water, cannot have been less than two miles broad; in spite of a fresh breeze and a head sea against him, he got fully half-way over, but he could not make head against the waves any further, and was obliged to turn back, when, being quite exhausted, he was soon killed.

"The distance he ran, taking in the different bends in the line, cannot have been less than eighteen miles, and he certainly swam more than two. I can give no idea of the length of time it took him to run this distance, but it took us something more than two hours; and it was evident, from the way in which the hounds were running, that he was a long way before us; and it was also plain that he was still fresh, as, quite at the end of the run, he went over the top of a very high hill, which a tired kangaroo never will attempt to do, as dogs gain so much on them in going up hill. His hind quarters weighed within a pound or two of seventy pounds, which is large for the Van Diemen's Land Kangaroo, though I have seen larger.

"We did not measure the length of the hop of this kangaroo; but on another occasion, when the Boomer had taken along the beach, and left his prints in the sand, the length of each jump was found to be just fifteen feet, and as regular as if they had been stepped by a serjeant. When a Boomer is pressed, he is very apt to take the water, and then it requires several good dogs to kill him; for he stands waiting for them, and as soon as they swim up to the attack, he takes hold of them with his fore-feet, and holds them under water. The buck is altogether very bold, and will generally make a stout resistance; for if he cannot get to the water, he will place his back against a tree, so that he cannot be attacked from behind, and then the best dog will find in him a formidable antagonist.

"The doe, on the contrary, is a very timid creature; and I have even seen one die of fear. It was in a place where we wished to preserve them, and as soon as we found that we were running a doe, we stopped the hounds just at the moment they were running into her. She had not received the slightest injury, but she lay down and died in about ten minutes. When a doe is beat she generally makes several sharp doubles, and then gets among the branches, or close to the trunk of a fallen tree, and remains so perfectly still, that she will allow you almost to ride over her without moving, and in this way she often escapes. A tolerably good kangaroo will generally give a run of from six to ten miles; but in general they do not run that distance in a straight line, but make one large ring back to the place where they were found, though the larger ones often go straight away."

An extraordinary difference is observable in the size of the sexes of this species, the female being not more than half the size of the male: she brings forth one young at a time, which as soon as it is clothed with hair assumes the colouring of the adult.

The specimens from which my drawings and descriptions are taken were killed in the neighbourhood of the Liverpool range in the middle of summer, and are both adults; I have, however, seen larger examples of the male. A slight variation is found to exist in specimens from different localities, some being much darker than those represented in the Plate, and others of a foxy-red. Albinos are occasionally, but very rarely, to be met with. As might reasonably be expected also, the fur is much thicker and more woolly in winter than in summer.

The Plate represents an adult male and female.